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State of the State Address Delivered by Governor Mel Carnahan Wednesday, January 19, 2000

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tem, Distinguished State Officials, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the State Supreme Court, Members of the 90th General Assembly, and Citizens of the State of Missouri:

INTRODUCTION

After I finished my service in the Air Force, Jean and I moved back to Missouri so I could attend law school at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Our first home was a small one near the Fairgrounds.

And at that time, when the Boone County Fair was going strong, if it was a hot day and the wind was in the right direction, the air around our house could become pretty strong as well.

But that's a whole other story.

The contractor who built our house had purchased the material to construct a series of houses—all in a row and all the same design.

However, since our house was the last in the series to be built, it was cobbled together with the leftover scraps.

The flooring boards were all different sizes.

The bathroom tile and kitchen cabinets were also mix and match, so let's just say, those two rooms had their own unique character.

And the trim and the hardware in the house did not even come close to matching.

But the most distinctive feature of the house was one we first discovered on the day we arrived.

The way our home was designed, the garage was supposed to lead into a laundry room that led to the rest of the house—except it didn't.

The contractor had never finished the job.

There was no door.

The steps in the garage, which were supposed to connect to the laundry room, led right up to a solid wall.

Over the next three days and nights, while Jean and I slept with our baby boy Randy on the floor waiting for our furniture to arrive, we had plenty of time to discuss what we were going to do about this problem.

But when the furniture movers arrived, our problem was solved.

When the last piece of furniture was off the truck, the mover found a door.

Now none of us had any idea where that door came from, but when the mover asked us if we wanted it, we certainly accepted.

Then I got out my tools, and after a lot of work with a hammer and saw, I managed to cut a hole in the wall, build a frame for the door, and actually hang the door.

Now with my limited carpentry skills, this task was no mean feat.

In fact, the first time that I tried to hang that door, I put the hinges in wrong, and the door fell right out of its frame.

I'm sure it looked like a bad episode from "Tool Time."

But when the job was finally finished, and we could approach the door with every confidence that it would not only open properly but not fall on any of us in the process, I was quite proud of my handiwork.

I tell you this story because I believe it illustrates why we are here as public servants on behalf of the citizens of the State of Missouri.

For the past seven years, our administration has worked with you to open doors for Missourians.

Sometimes, it was just a matter of a little oiling and planing to make the doors work properly.

Other times, we had to take the door out and start over.

And on some occasions, just like in the case of Jean and my first house, we began at square one and put in a door where one didn't exist before.

However, because of what we have been able to accomplish...because of the doorways we built and the new opportunities we created...Missourians are now better educated, healthier, and safer than they were when we started.

ECONOMY

Any builder will tell you that in order for doors to open properly, you must begin with a solid foundation.

For our state, that foundation is a strong economy.

Through our responsible fiscal management and aggressive economic development efforts of the past seven years, we have built that foundation.

Certainly, Missouri faces some difficult economic challenges.

Most urgent among them is the crisis confronting our family farmers and our entire agricultural sector.

But overall, our state's economy remains strong.

Since 1993, we have helped to create a net total of more than 365,000 new jobs for Missourians.

And remember that seven percent unemployment in 1993?

Today Missouri's unemployment rate is 2.3 percent--the lowest in thirty years.

Another positive development for Missourians since 1993 is what has happened to median income.

The median income of Missouri families has risen 11.4 percent in real terms since 1993.

And we have achieved all this while keeping our own house in order.

We've kept our state debt very low, and we continue to be one of only a handful of states with a triple A bond rating from all major rating agencies.

Furthermore, we've succeeded in providing meaningful tax relief for Missouri's working families.

Seven years ago, to help give our young people a better education, taxes were raised on higher income earners.

Then we were able to get to work on cutting taxes.

The cutting began in 1994 and 1996.

And we really got moving in 1997, 1998, and 1999.

Among other things, we cut personal income taxes several times and eliminated the general state sales tax on food.

We also cut the franchise tax and exempted small businesses entirely.

Some of our tax cuts from last year are just now kicking in.

When they do, we will have provided approximately \$650 million in permanent tax cuts since 1994, and a net decrease in taxes of more than 300 million dollars since the beginning of this administration.

Your association—the bipartisan National Conference of State Legislatures—recently noted that because of the tax cuts we passed in 1999, Missourians will receive the third largest tax cut in the nation this year.

Last year, we provided Missourians with the second largest tax cut in the nation.

And the year before that, Missourians received the ninth largest tax cut in the country.

That is a remarkable record, and we did it all while still being able to increase resources for our schools, expand services to senior citizens, improve access to quality health care—particularly for our children—and meet other crucial challenges and responsibilities.

Is it any wonder that Missouri received national recognition last year when Governing Magazine gave our state the highest grade in a landmark study of state government management practices?

We were one of only four states to receive this honor.

Our challenge now is to sustain this strong economy and ensure that all areas of the state benefit from this economic growth.

We are well positioned to do both.

With your help, over the past few years, we have put into place some of the most creative and aggressive economic development tools anywhere in the nation.

And we are seeing dramatic results.

Significant job growth and job retention.

A growing high-tech industry spurred by new seed capital.

Major development projects that not only generate new business, but preserve the unique historic character of our downtowns and neighborhoods as well.

And job training programs that will guarantee we have a competitive workforce for the 21st century marketplace.

Initiatives such as our historic preservation tax credit, distressed communities program, and neighborhood preservation act have brought tremendous statewide benefits.

And in our urban areas, these initiatives are generating a true renaissance.

This is important for all Missourians because the urban centers are major economic engines that help provide sustained prosperity throughout Missouri.

EDUCATION

As my first official act as Governor back in 1993, I opened the doors of the Governor's Office to a group of 80 elementary students.

I wanted to send a clear message to all Missourians that the education of our young people would be our administration's top priority.

I told those students that we would be doing everything possible to give them the educational resources they needed to succeed in the years ahead and that we would be doing something never done in the history of education in Missouri.

And now we are seeing the positive results of our effort.

Our improvements begin at our children's earliest age—those years that research now confirms are critical to their future success.

As a result of our early childhood care and education initiative two years ago and stronger investment in other early childhood programs, we are now greatly increasing the access of Missouri families to quality child care programs for their young children. Our Outstanding Schools Act, which I signed into law my first year in office, has made a tremendous impact in classrooms across Missouri.

Thanks to its improved way of distributing school funding, emphasis on technology, new performance standards, tough accountability measures, and other initiatives, education in Missouri is taking important steps forward.

Since 1993, we have reduced class sizes in our lower grades.

The number of kindergartners now enrolled in full time programs has increased by 137 percent.

The number of schools offering summer school has increased by 165 percent.

Dropout rates for Missouri students have gone down, and graduation rates have climbed.

And we have connected 97 percent of the school districts in Missouri to the Internet.

These are real demonstrations of progress that our schools can take pride in having achieved.

Another program from the Outstanding Schools Act which is greatly benefiting Missouri students is our A-Plus Program.

If students complete our A-Plus curriculum successfully, they can attend a Missouri public community college, state technical college, or adult program at an area vocational school for two years and have their tuition and books fully paid.

One of the many students to benefit from this innovative program is Patrick Cox from my hometown.

Patrick was a member of the first class to complete the A-Plus curriculum at Rolla High School.

A-Plus helped him attend State Fair Community College in Sedalia.

Now a junior business management major at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Patrick feels those two years of personal and academic growth at State Fair gave him a leg up in succeeding at the University.

He also was greatly influenced by the 50 hours of mentoring he was required to complete as a part of the A-Plus curriculum.

Patrick mentored elementary and junior high at-risk students in the Rolla school system.

He gained such personal satisfaction from that experience that he spent ten weeks this past summer working with troubled boys at the Boys and Girls Town in St. James.

At this time, I would like to ask him to stand so you can all meet this fine young man.

To continue our significant progress in education, I am proud to recommend that once again our school foundation formula be fully funded.

I also want to see more of our teachers become National Board Certified teachers.

We currently have only 29 nationally certified teachers in our entire state.

Under my plan, we will pay the application fees for the certificate and the cost for substitute teachers' pay so we can prepare 100 new teachers to become nationally certified.

Keeping Missouri students safe has been another major objective of our administration.

Under our Safe Schools Act of 1996, we will continue to offer school district grants, which they can tailor to make their schools a more secure environment for students.

This legislative session I want to build on this progress by asking the legislature to approve several recommendations that were made by the School Violence Task Force I appointed last year.

One step we need to take is clarifying the definition of gun-free school zones for our school districts.

A gun-free school zone should exist in any school setting--on the school bus or playground or at an extracurricular activity.

Our penalties for making false bomb threats should be expanded to include any threat to harm students and school property.

We also need to put stronger laws on the books to keep our children safe from dangerous firearms.

How many times have we picked up the paper to read about young children who harmed a playmate or suffered personal injury themselves because a loaded firearm was readily available?

To prevent more of these tragedies, I am proposing legislation to require that every new handgun sold in our state must be sold with a child safety lock.

While we are working to create a safe environment for our students, we've also got to do more to reduce violent behavior in the first place.

Specifically, we must do more to build character and personal strength in our young people—to instill respect and a sense of community—to prepare our children to be the leaders of tomorrow.

Incidents such as the Columbine shooting in Colorado or bomb threats here in Missouri should not happen.

But to prevent them, we have to teach our children to respect each other and to know right from wrong.

That responsibility rests primarily with parents.

However, all of us have a role to play in helping our children build character and become responsible adults.

Our recently released School Violence Task Force report recommends several concrete steps we can take immediately to reduce violent behavior and build character among our young people.

Those recommendations include:

---teaching our children the social skills they need to get along with each other and respect one another;

---and creating opportunities for children to use peer mediation and conflict resolution;

---and incorporate anti-drug, anti-violence, and anti-gang messages in their every day lives;

Most of these recommendations revolve around the classroom.

While decisions about curriculum should be made at the local level, I strongly encourage communities to seriously consider implementing these recommendations, which I strongly endorse.

Together, we can make a real difference in our children's lives.

We can build the character and moral stamina they need to grow into decent, honest adults.

URBAN SCHOOLS

Certainly, one of our biggest challenges will be helping our two largest urban school districts in St. Louis and Kansas City to improve.

Last October, our State Board of Education advised both districts that they were going to move into unaccredited status because they are not meeting crucial academic performance standards.

For more than two decades, these districts have been under the control of the federal courts, who directed billions of dollars to the two districts with no accountability taking place.

Now, finally, that is no longer the case.

This administration and Attorney General Jay Nixon have been able to accomplish what previous administrations and attorneys general could not—convincing the federal courts that they should return local control of the school districts to local leadership. We did this two ways.

First, we were able to develop and establish new lines of communication in the community and bring together those who understood the importance of a successful public school system to these urban areas.

Second, our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, under the leadership of Commissioner Bartman, together with the State Board of Education, under the leadership of Peter Herschend, formulated an urban education plan which demands accountability and high standards.

It is their work which the court recognized in its order November 17, 1999, when it stated one of its reasons for restoring "state and local authorities to the control of the Kansas City School District."

And so, as we begin the 21st century, we can all focus on education, not litigation.

We should give the law and the new accountability measures time to do their jobs.

With the courts moving out of the way, the state is working aggressively to help those districts repair their long-standing and long-neglected problems.

Our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has been working closely with both the Kansas City and St. Louis school districts to help them improve their academic performance and meet the requirements of the new standards within two years.

The two school districts have recently announced preliminary school improvement plans, taken steps to downsize their central office bureaucracies, and established direct lines of communication with their building principals—all key steps to progress. In both districts, state education officials are identifying and assigning expert teachers to work directly with principals and teachers to introduce "best practices" from other schools.

Some people have declared that a state of emergency has suddenly arisen because the two urban districts are not meeting the new standards.

The reality is that the emergency in urban education has existed for many years, and the lack of accountability during the period of court control has made the problems worse.

Now, with our new standards in place, the problems are finally being measured.

And with the courts moving out of the way, we can finally hold those districts accountable for results—like we are doing in the rest of Missouri.

TOBACCO SETTLEMENT

The national tobacco settlement provides us with new opportunities to improve the health of future generations of Missourians. While yesterday's court decision may be good news, all litigation is not finally resolved.

And it is unclear whether the federal government will attempt to recover part of these funds.

But we must be prepared to receive and use these funds effectively and appropriately when they do begin to arrive.

That means we need to have a plan in place, and that plan must be sent to a vote of the people if we are to ensure that the settlement is not tied up in further lengthy litigation.

I believe we should establish a Trust Fund to set aside the tobacco settlement money and require clear accountability for the use of the funds.

I believe that these funds would be most appropriately used for health care; smoking prevention efforts; health research that will prevent or cure diseases such as cancer and heart and lung disorders; early childhood education and care; and helping senior citizens pay the spiraling costs of prescription drugs.

And I believe that most Missourians would agree.

So I am asking you to authorize a ballot issue that would establish a trust fund to set aside the tobacco settlement funds and designate these specific uses for this new source of state money.

CHILDREN

Together we have worked hard to open doors for those who are unable to open them on their own—our children.

Some of this progress is the result of our work on increasing access to health care and better child abuse prevention efforts.

Because of the emphasis we have placed on seeing that our youngest citizens are immunized, today almost 86 percent of Missouri 2-year-olds have received this protection from harmful diseases.

Missouri has jumped from 49th in the nation to seventh place today on this important measure.

Probably one of the greatest days for me as Governor was when we worked together to provide access to health insurance for the thousands of Missouri children who were uninsured.

Thanks again, Senator Quick.

Now as a result of our efforts, over the past 18 months, we have been able to extend health care coverage to over 56,000 of these formerly uninsured children.

Two of those children and their parents are here with us today—Kayla and Kyle Miller and their parents, John and Lisa. This family is from Potosi.

John and Lisa have always worked hard to support their family.

But their wages have not always made it possible for them to pay for health insurance for their children.

Today, Lisa is the MC-Plus Coordinator for Washington County, and her children have health insurance, thanks to MC-Plus.

Kayla was finally able to get the dental care she desperately needed, and Kyle, who was having some problems with his school work because of vision problems, finally got glasses and is now doing well.

Just recently, John got a promotion at his job, and now the children will be moving to the co-pay group of MC-Plus For Kids. But as Lisa says,

"I no longer have to tell the kids we don't have the money to take them to the doctor and stay awake nights praying their pain and sickness will go away."

Please help me welcome John and Lisa Miller and their children Kayla and Kyle.

To build on our past record of protecting the lives of children, I will be urging you this legislative session to take action on several priorities of the Child Fatality Task Force, which I appointed last spring.

One of those is to put one of the most stringent laws in the nation on the books to stem the flow of child pornography on the Internet.

Our state definition of what constitutes child pornography will be brought up to date by including computer data, computer generated images, digital camera images or pictures, and visual depictions.

We propose enhancing the penalty for those who attempt to sell or produce child pornography to a sentence which would range from 10 to 30 years to life in prison.

In addition, the penalty for the possession of child pornography would be increased.

Our initiative also defines a new crime—furnishing pornography to a minor—which will be considered a Class A felony.

Thanks to legislation approved over the last three years, Missouri now has one of the strongest sexual predator laws in the country.

But this session, we need to add new provisions to protect our children.

Our proposal would allow the crimes of sexual assault, child molestation, and sexual abuse to be used in charging someone as a sexual predator.

METH

Another initiative I propose that the General Assembly adopt this session would increase the punishment for those who manufacture the dangerous drug methamphetamine around children.

We already have one of the toughest "meth" laws in the country—a model being used in other states and one that Congress is trying to emulate.

However, this year, I would like to see us expand on our work so we can offer protection to the children who are forced to live in the middle of these drug dens.

One of the horror stories that law enforcement officers have discovered while waging our war on "meth" is that some of those who manufacture this sinister substance do so at home with their children present.

I urge you to create the crime of unlawful drug transactions with a child--with a potential penalty of life in prison.

CRIME

Although our administration has been committed to opening doors to new opportunities for Missourians over the past seven years, we have tried to slam some doors shut as tight as possible—prison doors.

Thanks to your help with this effort, our most dangerous criminals are now serving an average of ten years longer than they did under the previous law.

The most violent juvenile offenders who commit adult crimes are now receiving adult sentences.

Sexual predators can now be given life sentences with a mandatory minimum of thirty years before ever being eligible for parole.

And victims are now receiving more support and assistance than under any other administration in Missouri's history.

These changes, in addition to greatly increased law enforcement training and resources, are having the desired effect.

The violent crime rate which was headed upward in 1992 has been reversed.

Since that time, Missouri's violent crime rate has decreased by over 26 percent.

To continue our efforts to improve safety and fight crime, this year I am asking your help in cracking down on one of the major causes of deaths and injuries in our state—drunken drivers.

Under the terms of our proposal, the legal blood alcohol content level for drivers of vehicles and boats will be lowered from .10 to .08.

The maximum jail time for a first offense will be increased from six months to one year.

We will also establish a new crime defined as aggravated driving with excessive blood alcohol content for drivers who risk the lives of others by getting behind the wheel with a blood alcohol content of .15 or greater.

Another area of our DWI law which particularly cries out for reform is the way we deal with repeat offenders.

Right now, drunken drivers that put the lives of you and your loved ones at risk can have three prior convictions before they can be convicted of a felony.

I propose those who have a blood alcohol content of .15 or above should receive a felony conviction on the first offense.

And there will be no more escapes for those first-time offenders who are given suspended impositions of sentence for driving

under the influence.

That possibility will be gone.

I would also propose that our Boating While Intoxicated laws parallel the DWI laws.

I realize these are extremely tough new provisions, but when you think about one American dying every thirty-two minutes because of an alcohol-related crash or someone being injured every two minutes because of alcohol impaired drivers, tough is what we need to be.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Another door that must be opened wider over the next few years in our state is the one that offers service to seniors.

We rank 12th nationally in the percentage of our population that is age 65 or older.

And projections tell us that by the year 2020, one fourth of our entire state population will be seniors.

From the beginning of our administration, helping seniors achieve the best quality of life possible has been a top priority.

This year, we want to take new steps to assure the quality of care for our elderly and protect them from abuse.

We already have a Long Term Care Ombudsman Program with 345 volunteers visiting our nursing homes and residential care facilities.

Sad as it is to say, most elder abuse occurs at home. We want to establish a new In-Home Ombudsman Program so volunteers can report those incidences of abuse or neglect that are taking place in home settings.

We also want to provide grants to medical schools and other organizations that educate health care professionals for the development of courses and educational materials on elder abuse.

And we will start four new pilot projects called Aging In Place.

The goal of these projects is to enable elderly individuals to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible by delaying or avoiding the need for institutional care through case management and in-home services.

TRANSPORTATION

For the last three years, I have urged Republicans and Democrats to work together with me in opening the door to major improvements in our state transportation system.

We must continue that effort.

Our transportation infrastructure is crucial to our state's economic well being.

But so far, we have been unable to reach consensus on how to move forward.

Consensus is crucial because the reality is that we are either going to move forward together, or we're not going to be able to move forward at all.

Fiscal responsibility is also crucial.

We must develop a plan that will not burden future generations with debt and will not endanger our state's solid bond rating. But if we work together, we can find a solution, and I remain committed to working with you to do so.

AGRICULTURE

One of the doors we must fight—and fight hard—to keep open leads to new hope for our sagging farm economy.

Low prices at the market and severe weather conditions in many areas have been a devastating combination for Missouri citizens who are trying to make a living by farming.

I want to provide additional resources for our Department of Agriculture to help farmers better market their products and adopt innovative alternatives to traditional agricultural practices.

I am calling for a stronger investment in our Rural Economic Assistance Program to assist rural communities.

And I have called for the immediate formation of a Farm Crisis Response Task Force to review and identify current state and federal resources and regulations to assess how we may be able to help the plight of our family farmers.

CONCLUSION

Since this will be the last time I will come before you in this public setting, I want to thank you, the members of the Missouri General Assembly, for all we have been able to accomplish.

While we have made significant progress together, our work is far from finished.

I have outlined an ambitious agenda for this session, and we owe all Missourians our best efforts.

Before I leave this dais, I want to recognize some others as well.

I want to thank my family for their constant love and support—and particularly my wife Jean, a First Lady who is truly remarkable.

I want to thank our team of statewide elected officials for being just that—a team.

And I want to thank our cabinet.

I also want to give a very special thank you to another team—my staff--both past and present.

No Governor could be more blessed.

To our state workers who give their all every day to provide better service for this state—a big thank you to you.

Once again, I am recommending marketplace salary increases for our state employees.

The average state employee will receive approximately a four percent increase.

And finally, my thanks to the people of the State of Missouri.

Now before I leave this chamber, I want to introduce you to several excellent reasons why we entered public service and why we continue to serve.

These are members of the Tiger Pre-School in Lamar, and they are accompanied by the director of the facility, Colleen Ratcliff. Tiger Pre-School serves 20 children in the morning and 20 in the afternoon and collaborates with the local Head Start Program to provide services to an additional 10 children.

It is linked with the Lamar school system and is located right across from the middle school.

Because the school district provides funding for professional development under a curriculum training program called Project Construct, Tiger Pre-School is helping to coordinate its services with the other two pre-schools in town and the local Head Start Program.

This is an important first.

But Tiger Pre-School is a first in itself.

The students who attend here would not be receiving early childhood care and education if it weren't for Tiger Pre-School.

And Tiger Pre-School would not be there if it had not been for the support of many of you.

Tiger Pre-School is one of the first new facilities to be established, thanks to House Bill 1519, which expanded our state's early childhood and education programs.

So now I want you to meet this fine group of youngsters who came all the way from Lamar to do a song that they've learned for you.

Ladies and gentlemen, here is our future.

In these eyes rests the vision of dreams unseen.

In these hands lie achievements yet to be realized.

And in these hearts burns the hope of a better Missouri to come.

May the Almighty guide our words and deeds in the days ahead as we go about our business...preparing the way for Missouri's children...by opening doors to a new century.

Thank you.